## 1,900 armed hold-ups

# Dacoits remain unbridled, violent during the year

**By Tahir Siddiqui**

KARACHI, Dec 31: Dacoits and muggers remained unbridled during 1998 as the cases of armed hold-ups shot up to around 1,900 from 1,409 in the previous year.

These hold-ups included more than 750 house robberies in which gangs of bandits not only took away cash, jewellery, prize bonds and valuables, but also killed and wounded scores of their victims, including several elderly men and women and some policemen.

In many cases, the victims, both men and women, were manhandled and beaten up with the butts of guns.

The most terrible house robbery of the year was committed in Surjani Town in which five of a family — a 60-year-old woman, her three young daughters and a son — were shot dead by unknown intruders. The police have yet to detect the case.

In another violent house robbery in Defence, a gang of dacoits killed three brothers in the presence of their elderly father. The police, however, succeeded in detecting the case as one of the dacoits had also been killed by his accomplices during the firing on the inmates. But, the main accused in this case were not reported to have been arrested so far.

Moreover, in several house robberies, dacoits also molested young women, though the victims did not report the incidents to police. In Gulshan-i-Iqbal at least three such incidents occurred within two weeks in June.

According to one of the victims, who did not wish to be identified, a gang of four dacoits, all in their mid and late twenties, stormed into the house in the small hours of the morning, held the inmates hostage at gunpoint and then locked them into a room. The intruders after scooping every thing of their interest from the house took the 20-year-old girl in another room and two of them did what the victim termed was the most disgusting and terrible experience of the life for her.

Though the violent robberies were reported from almost every locality, the entire city remained at the mercy of robbers during 1998, the worst-hit were localities of the Central district and the affluent localities of the South district.

In most of the house dacoities, the robbers mainly looted cash, prize bonds and jewellery as the disposal of other looted articles, such as electronic home appliances and other valuables, is a bit difficult for them.

Besides, a very large number of dacoits' victims did not lodge FIRs with the police who normally discourage a victim to get registered the case in a bid to "maintain the record of respective police station".

In many incidents of the armed hold-ups, the police reportedly registered cases under the sections that pertains to stealing and theft, thus minimising the gravity of the crime and giving intentional or unintentional favour to the culprits.

According to police sources, a large number of the dacoits' gangs operating in Karachi did not belong to the city. Most of them hailed either from parts of the interior of Sindh or upcountry.

The police sources said these gangs were operating on an inter-provincial level and suspended their activities for a month or so after striking at two or three places. They normally left the city after committing some big robberies, they said.

Besides, several other gangs of illegal immigrants are operating in the city under the very nose of police.

Moreover, some of the gangs busted by the police during the year comprised police personnel of lower ranks.

The incidents of mugging were also reported to have increased during 1998. It is widely thought that the most of the muggers operate with the connivance of police.

Similarly, cases of shop robberies and dacoities also swelled to over 250 from 151 in 1997. At least 10 bank branches and 11 petrol stations were looted this year. Last year six banks and 12 petrol pumps had been looted.

**BLASTS:** As many as a dozen people were killed and over 90 others, including women and children, wounded in 15 bomb blasts during 1998.

In all the explosion, the terrorists had used locally assembled devices equipped with a 15-minute timers.